

E-Politics and the Evolution of Technodemocracies

E-Politics and the Evolution of Technodemocracies

By

Ilia Galán Díez

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



E-Politics and the Evolution of Technodemocracies

By Ilia Galán Díez

This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2023 by Ilia Galán Díez

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-2746-8

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-2746-1

This book has been awarded with a Cátedra de Excelencia at the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid and Banco de Santander, 2016-2017, and was written by a visiting professor at the University of Oxford (Oxford Internet Institute) collaborating with Luciano Floridi. The book was translated with funds of the Institute of Historiography Caro Baroja and Humanities Department: Geography, History and Art, at the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Pro-logos</i> Without Reason	viii
---------------------------------------	------

I. Fatigue of the Current Democracies: The New Old Regime

Chapter 1	2
The Vices of History Continue	
Chapter 2	5
A General Collapse of Trust: The Pornography of Vileness	
Chapter 3	8
Crisis of Crises	
Chapter 4	9
Tired of Voting without the Power to Choose What Really Matters	
Chapter 5	14
The Upper House, the Council of Sages in the Face of Our <i>Demoligarchies</i>	
Chapter 6	17
Votes against and Hateful Representatives	
Chapter 7	20
Progressing while Waning	
Chapter 8	23
Anti-establishmentarians and Anarchists: But a Different System Is Possible	
Chapter 9	26
The Return of Hope? New Times, New Parties, and New Feelings	

II. e-Countries, New Identities, New Anarchism

Chapter 10	32
The Unfettered Web That Captured the Lost Utopia	
Chapter 11	34
Dreams or Virtual Nations	
Chapter 12	44
Multiple Agents or Decentralised Power	
Chapter 13	48
There Was Never a Social Contract, But There <i>Was</i> General Responsibility	
Chapter 14	51
15M and Popular Uprisings Against the Representatives of the People: The New Social Contract	
Chapter 15	56
The Discovery of the New City	
Chapter 16	60
Revisiting the Myth of Progress	
Chapter 17	64
Imperial Trading Once Again	
Chapter 18	67
Goodbye Passports; Stateless <i>Neonations</i>	
Chapter 19	71
The Divided Unity of Powers and Kings by Examination	
Chapter 20	76
Apoptosis or the Self-Devouring State	
Chapter 21	82
Powers in the Shadows or the Men in Grey	

III. The Parliament of Machines and Humans: Pros and Cons of the New ICTs Applied to Politics; Is this the Way to a Direct Democracy?

Chapter 22	92
Data Parties or Customer Hunters	
Chapter 23	97
Atomised or Atomic Democracies	
Chapter 24	100
Indirectly Representative Direct Democracies: Everything is a Referendum	
Chapter 25	110
Blowing Up the System of Representation: Exams for Sage Representatives	
Chapter 26	116
<i>Demomeritocracy</i> or Government of Collegiate Scholars	
Chapter 27	118
The Importance of a Good <i>Hypersenate</i> and Its New Configuration (Plato Returns, Thanks to the Internet)	
Chapter 28	121
On Elections for a King or Cyber-Emperor	
Chapter 29	125
When the President is a Robot	
Chapter 30	128
Algorithms, the New Judges?	
Chapter 31	133
The Parliament of Robots	
Chapter 32	139
Election Campaigns; Passed or Failed Programmes; Elections in Tatters; The People Fragmented and Thus United	
Bibliography	145
About the Author	153

PRO-LOGOS WITHOUT REASON

These acts of sedition by the rebellious children of the imagination explain some of my fevers: they are the cause, unknown to science, of my exaltations and my depressions. [. . .] Their creations, now crammed together like stunted plants in a nursery, struggle to stretch out their fantastic existence by disputing the atoms of the memory, like the scant juice of a sterile land. It is high time we made way for the deep waters, fed daily from a growing, live spring . . . those waters that will eventually burst through the dike.

—Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, introduction to *Rhymes*

It is well known that Hegel, in the belief that this was true, stated that everything real is rational and everything rational is real. Thus, his faith in rational forces was great, as if the human view were the only one possible in the world. Now we tend to correct this point of view, also through studies on emotional intelligence; however, today we are also faced with “artificial intelligence” and its extremely powerful and superior calculating, combinatorial power, which is effective for creating relationships and is efficient in many fields never before imagined.

However, another presumptuous thinker, like the famous German philosopher of the Absolute, might today preach to us that the online world or cyberspace is the real world and that everything real is already—or will be—in cyberspace, transmuted into the form of information or data.

The fact that faith moves mountains, as Jesus of Nazareth said, is something easy to verify: it is enough to see the faith of engineers in their projects, the faith of those who finance them and propose activities, and the scientific use of reason through technical skill. It is even easier to contemplate how ideals transform the world: how imagination, through human actions, prevails upon the physical world—at least on our planet. If we think further, we will see that this is all a mere trifle, something ridiculous compared with the universe, populated by billions of galaxies and that there are, therefore, more stars (and probably many more planets) than grains of sand on all the beaches around the entire globe. Despite all this, human action upon our environment has greatly changed the landscape of nature and, in many places, pure nature is now appreciated, as it is strange to find areas still virgin, untainted, unfertilised, and unviolated, since in almost everything we see, there appears to be human intervention.

Now, also the online world, the web or infosphere, is mutating reality, at least it is mutating human life—our way of thinking and seeing. But it is also transforming our way of acting—and not just through people but also through programmed machines or robots. For that reason, it is increasingly essential that we think deeply about this, before the consequences bear down upon us. A particularly relevant field is that of politics and human organisation, as well as the relations of power and distribution of goods—the way we manage freedom and justice or how we demonstrate brotherhood.

Much has changed in a few years and it seems to me that our society has to change even more. This essay is based on research undertaken during my stay at the Oxford Internet Institute during the 2016–17 academic year. It continues the studies embarked on by Luciano Floridi, especially those published in *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality* (2014), combining them with other studies and attempting to take some further steps to scrutinise the new political formats that the new information and communication technologies or information and communication technologies offer us.

Although some proposals or ways of seeing politics and renewing democracy may be striking—and even out of place—we should not forget that in Rousseau's time his view also seemed strange, ideal, and almost insane: defending democracy or raising the issue of a social contract (although this idea was not new at all). Similarly, the discovery of human rights and their defence was also something novel for many (although this wasn't also a previous idea), from Locke onwards, clashing with many prejudices of the time. Our time has not been vaccinated against prejudice, since the human view always starts with assumptions and beliefs too deeply rooted to actually be recognised as such; hence the need for a continuous critical view of one's own existence and that of others. However, in the case of those mortals called “men,” we must seek not only understanding but also mutual help and togetherness, to make our environment somewhat better in each generation.

We now live almost more inside computer screens and mobile phones, connected, than outside them. As Bécquer expresses, in the verses of his Rhyme 75:

I do not know if that world of visions
lives outside or goes within us.
But I know I am acquainted with many
that I do not know.

I.

FATIGUE OF THE CURRENT DEMOCRACIES: THE NEW OLD REGIME

CHAPTER 1

THE VICES OF HISTORY CONTINUE

History books have accustomed us to interpreting the past as two separate worlds, before and after the French Revolution, where the Old Regime supposedly came to an end, transformed by a democratic, liberal universe more in line with rationality and justice, with no legal privileges of estate or blood. Now, officially, in a significant proportion of the most developed world, we live within democratic regimes, where fundamental freedoms should be guaranteed.

However, globalised and open information, if not totally, for the most part, gives us visual clarity that this is an ideal only very partially achieved. We can see it through its critics, with its critics, and not only through a few controlled media sources (as used to be the case with newspapers and certain publishers, television channels, or radio stations), that this is an ideal only very partially achieved. In fact, the privileges of the Old Regime continued to exist after the time of powder and wigs because the nobility, in some countries, is still afforded special treatment and a significant number of European countries still have blood royalty and traditions alien to a rationality that seeks justice. Similarly, although most states have constitutions or legal systems where human rights are guaranteed, many still suffer from a lack of jobs, decent homes, healthcare, and so on.

We increasingly hear about “failed states” that are unable to fulfil their minimum or essential functions, as pointed out by Floridi (Floridi 2012, 738), pointing to states that cannot control their borders, collect taxes, administer justice, and maintain or develop state structures to a certain minimum level, such as education and health. This collapse is due to the lack of any real practice of human rights or state of peace, resulting in the population no longer being able to live together due to ethnic, racial, linguistic, or cultural struggles. This leads to that feeling of failure, due also to the expectations we have today about what a state and its government should be—far superior to the kingdoms or tribes of past centuries, where the essential element was security but there was neither education nor public health, nor any of the many possibilities that we would understand to be essential today, although these are very recently acquired. These expectations provoke attitudes and behaviours that will later be key for the development

of coexistence. It seems to us that certain infrastructures are indispensable, or—as Marx puts it—certain superstructures make the action and infrastructures that enable us to achieve a pleasant, peaceful coexistence possible.

This happens in the developed countries, or those termed *first world*, while in others not even these levels of requirement have been reached; although, given the comparison and knowledge (possible today in an infosphere typical of a globalised world) there is of these idealised countries, expectations also change course to reach a standard of social welfare like that enjoyed by so many European, North American, or certain Asian countries, for instance.

However, many of these structures are already failing in our society, slowly falling apart and degenerating, like in Italy the railway system around the year 2000 and public road infrastructure, and so on, or similarly in Britain (due to privatisation), with the deterioration of healthcare or the danger of not being able to maintain the pension system to support the elderly. The clash between expectations and reality provokes frustration and criticism, and, even more, the greater possibility of demanding that reality—without doubt, something much better than exists at present.

Perhaps it is this non-conformity in human beings that is a gift that makes us grow and also be unsatisfied with what we have. This is what brought humanity out of the caves, looking for inventions and options to combat excessive cold and heat, fighting hunger with hunting instruments or agricultural tools, fighting disease with the development of medicine and, in general, developing knowledge, growing in technical skill until reaching the present status of the sciences. We have attempted to achieve an existence that has made our weak species (in the physical sense) the most intelligent, the most powerful, and the most fearsome of all those known in the universe, the best adapted to any climate or circumstance, capable of flying (planes) or diving underwater for days (in submarines or using air tanks, etc.), of drilling through mountains or running at high speed through the galleries that traverse the underworld of Pluto, surpassing moles in nature (the subway, underground trains, etc.), and creating fire in its hands, the way Zeus carried lightning, taming it.

The desire for improvement or expectations was not the same in Ancient Egypt as it was in the medieval period or after the French Revolution, where a world of certain well-being for all was already sought after, not only for a few privileged by birth or fortune who did not deserve their luck in any way.

The fact that even in a society of *good angels* it would be necessary to lay down some rules of collaboration or systems of organisation, coordination, or cooperation takes us to the need for what Floridi calls *infraethics* (Floridi

2014, 739) in the positive sense, similar to what Marx called superstructure, in the negative sense. The order of resources and access to and enjoyment of these, as well as their recycling, are all key to human society, as opposed to chaos—or the privilege of a few, through ordinances or unjust laws. So this implies an attempt to be as reasonable as possible, at the same time respecting justice and, as far as possible, the affective, intuitive universe, and so on: a set of values that penetrate through laws and systems of organisation or knowledge, and doors to accessing knowledge. This is because it is also important not only to have water tanks with lots of water, but also to have good quality. This is how combined research into sociology, economy, politics, and laws around health systems, security, education, property rights, and so on, have been studied over the last few decades: if this fails, it will not be easy to resolve human priorities.

CHAPTER 2

A GENERAL COLLAPSE OF TRUST: THE PORNOGRAPHY OF VILENESS

All this is very difficult to maintain when trust is eroded. As Floridi points out,¹ “trust has always made morality capable.” The fact that we notice this is mainly due to information technology, since we now find out more easily than before how governments lie to us and news travels as fast as the batting of an eyelid; thus, we see how difficult it is to believe certain official versions and how dubious their plausibility is. This mistrust of those who represent us, on the other hand, has its positive dimension, as a critical awareness can be developed towards the systems of organisation and those who organise their representatives, but if mistrust goes too far, nothing can be done. Most human transactions are based on a certain dose of trust; thus, when we are allowed to try on a jacket in a shop, the staff assume that we will not run away with the merchandise, without paying, no matter how cold it is outside, and even if we are dressed in the scantiest summer clothes.

A minimum of good ethical behaviour is absolutely necessary to maintain trust (total perfection is not necessary but political positions have a duty to maintain a certain degree of exemplarity). Thus, Floridi points out (Floridi 2015, 165–66) like so many others, that the world needs a major injection of ethics, from business to religious conflict—or multicultural disputes and international relations. This is the best vaccine and society, like a physical body, needs to be cared for with this permanent treatment to defend it from numerous mutant *bacteria*.

Moral behaviour appears to have become degraded—or perhaps it is also now more visible—becoming increasingly less moral, perhaps due to rapid economic growth in recent decades. This has made easy enrichment to immoral levels possible for some, creating large numbers of nouveau riche; furthermore, differences in social status and income make abuses easier and

¹ “To use the previous example, trust has always been a moral enabler. The fact that only in recent years we have focused so much on its ethical role is largely due to the impact of ICTs, which have worked as a magnifier.” Luciano Floridi, *ibid.*, 740.

more widespread. This could also be influenced by a waning in religious faith among a large proportion of the population, leading to more relaxed moral attitudes, especially when there is no fear of the “next world,” where heartless behaviour might be punished. The materialism of a bourgeois and consumer society is, without a doubt, more propitious to hedonistic behaviour, to caring about the *here and now*, without worrying so much about the community or what might come later in or beyond this life. This attitude is more alien to grand new approaches with horizons that people perhaps do not believe in, or do not believe are important, since the physical ego is what marks behaviour, and individuals have the limitations they have today.

In any case, none of these reasons excludes the fact that a globalised world enables us to spot defects better than ones that have arisen under the shadow of past tyrannies, where information was censored or filtered by authoritarian power that was fierce in its repression.

Talking—providing information—has too often meant taking a deadly risk. Today, however, this *is* possible. If it is not possible in one’s own country, then it can be through others: the news can be read from a computer server in Russia or located in the USA, Japan, or the Philippines, so that the flow of knowledge or data that a certain power would prefer to conceal within their tightly closed claws escapes like water through their fingers.

It is true that for the great majority of people the possibilities of vital development and comforts have increased, but now the differences are clearer. Millionaires are no longer hidden in their skyscrapers, nor do the old aristocrats hide behind the windows of a baroque palace any longer, because the internet reveals their pictures through that now universal system of espionage, the mobile phone, with built-in cameras and video, so that any fact, whether significant or not, can be “posted” on the internet to be seen by millions of people around the world, like the old pillory—repeated in pictures or news—with economic or biographical data, and so on. The same is true for the crimes or activities of politicians. In the past, we had to go to a newspaper library and contrast statements to point out that they contradicted each other. Now, the search is much simpler; if not everything, still a great deal is open to general scrutiny.

The new revolution has arrived to be born into that New World, the New Continent, which also emerged in America, but in this case with the internet and the big computer companies. However, this is not a physical continent but rather an indeterminate one: this is the universal network of messages and knowledge, woven by mathematical combinations through an electricity that transmits glances, visions, and thoughts; it is a kind of universal reproduction of the human brain but with an intelligence or soul common to

all humanity (reworking Aristotle's theories from Averroes), where dendrites are computers or servers, and electrical discharges from one to another are data transmission, and so on.

CHAPTER 3

CRISIS OF CRISES

When everything seems to have been falling apart for years, a certain familiarity with despair sets in; becoming accustomed to catastrophe, the recession ceases to make any impact with its continuous crises, becoming a depressing fatality. But with the beginning of the first great economic crisis of the new millennium, the middle classes that it has taken so much effort to forge and develop in Western countries—and that have provided so much stability to the economic and political system—are now precisely the ones that have seen their position most endangered. The majority have become impoverished and many feel themselves now to be workers from the least privileged levels of society: even university professors feel themselves to be members of the *proletariat*, with major uncertainty in terms of their future, and the possibility of being excluded from society, falling into the abyss of unemployment, increasingly widespread in many countries and almost endemic—many are even close to misery, including people employed in nations that have almost full employment (the USA, United Kingdom, etc.).

When the economy was growing and there was room for everyone or almost everyone, protests were relegated to behind the scenes; however, as soon as the threat of losing one's home, job, and stability increased, the rusty hooks of fear gripped the minds of large masses of people and, along with this, an anger at those who have become disproportionately rich under this system, while a very large sector has suffered serious impoverishment. The lack of a fair division of wealth, the gradual waning of the "welfare society," and the collapse of institutional support for human development for all, with falling income and rising taxes, plus the cost of living, have increased criticism not only of the corruption of those who run the system in most countries but also of the model of the system that we used to enjoy but now suffer from to a great extent.

CHAPTER 4

TIRED OF VOTING WITHOUT THE POWER TO CHOOSE WHAT REALLY MATTERS

Since the beginning of the economic crisis at the beginning of the century, there has been a general feeling of weariness in the West of the current form of representative democracies and national parliaments. Their shortcomings, the privileges of their members, and, more seriously, their inefficiency and corruption, are all too evident.

As Zygmunt Bauman stated in an interview (Bauman 2015): “the crisis of democracy is the collapse of confidence; the belief that leaders are not only corrupt or stupid, but also incapable.” If, at other times, kings have been inept, stupid, or insane, at least it was possible to cover for them with capable advisors or intelligent ministers; in the information age, however, it is simply not possible that incompetent people, validated by exams with certification of studies, and entrance exams for certain government departments, lack the required skills. And this is a serious scandal—more serious when, in addition, it is a great injustice, because never in the West have there been so many generations with such advanced studies, so many quick and well-educated brains, carefully nurtured, in order that their talents be available to the service of all.

It is not just a matter of tiredness in the face of a system that no longer functions as expected, since new needs, new demands, and new expectations have arisen that the new technologies also encourage, where power could be more decidedly democratic and more devoted to the service of the whole of society, rather than to an oligarchy and the supposed political representation of the people, later betrayed at times in the party system, more in the service of themselves than of those who voted for them. It is true that there is a general view in the most advanced societies that we are experiencing a mixture between a certain style of democracy and a clear oligarchy set up by large enterprises, usually multinationals. However, the crisis has also meant that a large part of the population has stopped trusting its representatives—the economic losses of the majority, the progressive collapse of immense areas of the population that were previously considered

middle class and are now falling by the wayside, but without any safety net, in the face of the precariousness of the labour market and the increasing difficulty of achieving a relatively assured future, the dismantling of public services, health, or education . . .

The political and economic system increasingly resembles a hypermarket, but the pockets of the “customers” have fewer and fewer coins to hand over; purchasing power has decreased significantly and the voter, more than being a responsible citizen, appears to be a consumer, a number among others, with an attitude of certain disdain, except for when protesting or, as Byung-Chul Han states (Han 2014, 23):

Voters, as consumers, have no real interest in politics, in the active shaping of the community. They are neither willing nor able to take common political action. They only react passively to politics, grumbling and complaining, just like consumers over goods and services that displease them. Politicians and parties also follow this logic of consumption.

Thus, we see unexpected reactions in referendums and elections in countries such as the USA, United Kingdom, Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Greece, and Spain, amongst others. New parties have emerged in many countries, some of them presenting themselves as anti-establishment, clearly related to some anarchist-type trends or rather disenchantment and protest. Although most intend to change that system, there are no great alternative ideas, such as those offered in the times of the anarchist communes, the phalansteries, communist societies, and so on.

One of the most relevant changes has been brought about by the development of the information society. The internet and the new technologies make a different democratic system possible, where, if we wish, we can be continuously informed of what is being debated in our parliaments or senates, the laws being passed, and the arguments that are being put forward. The internet has allowed communication of the public life of politicians and what people, in much larger numbers than in the past, can denigrate or praise, simply by clicking on the “like” or “don’t like” button, among so many other options. Social networks and models spreading news or opinions can instantly make a sentence known to millions of people around the planet, even in different languages, thanks to automatic translation, however approximate.

When the economy is doing well, it seems that only multinationals and not the vast majority of people benefit; life gets better, in theory, but not for everyone. Globalisation has brought the exaggerated growth of a very limited number of fortunes, which have increased disproportionately, while the rest have seen their standard of living fall, bringing uncertainty and an

increasingly impoverished lifestyle, fundamentally in the most developed, stable, and democratic countries. Thus, even if sometimes the richest layers of society deign to share out a few crumbs from their banquet to those below them, this is not obvious to many.

What we see is instability, uncertainty, mistrust of the political class of this *old regime*—not that of kings and nobility but rather the prematurely ageing “new” society that emerged from France’s 1789 Revolution against the bourgeoisie. Now, instead of wigged heads, flocking around kings, anointed with magnificent pomp in the cathedrals of “their” cities, we now see grey-suited figures inhabiting glass skyscrapers, paying homage to the great banks, their theology based on chimeras or mental constructs: financial dreams under protective laws with a sinister tangle of clauses that only experts can interpret. Thus, the new parties have become the vassals of these new lords, grey eminences ruling from the shadows, before changing ministers and presidents. Not so, those who have the power of money—the great financial families whose names are engraved in charitable foundations, thus passing for generous patrons and leaving their mark upon the history of the eminences of each land. This is nothing new, since long before kings, princes, dukes, marquises, and counts paid for the construction of a convent or school, so grew the colleges of Oxford or Cambridge, financed by noble families whose greatness would later be replaced by that of the bourgeoisie, industry, or, more recently, the financial world.

The development of information technologies has brought about a flow of ideas, concepts, images, sounds, and data that until recently was unimaginable. This does not mean that they are any more reliable than old ones, no matter how many newspapers and television or radio stations have been run by their managers or the ill-intentioned protection of governments, filtering content to suit suspect wishes. This is what we have seen, through the great confusion of opinions, in the United Kingdom referendum to split from the European Union—or the presidential elections before the Trump era.

In recent years we have seen the collapse of the always weak confidence in democratic governments and the party system that has gradually been stifling us since the Second World War in much of the West. In Africa or Asia, we have also seen these upheavals, with a general distrust of politicians and the groups that depend on them, considered almost as an enemy class of the people who elected them and feel betrayed by their representatives. Civil society, animated by young people and those disenchanted with the old movements, is now attempting to devise new organisational structures, supported precisely by the new communication technologies.

As soon as our democracies or liberal political systems have been stripped naked and the masks have fallen off, we see, exposed on the internet, the sum totals of these fortunes and the ways banking transactions are negotiated, and the preferential political treatment of the rich and the resulting huge resentment, which has been growing among the middle classes, who are now ever closer economically to the least privileged. The middle classes, now working classes, feel close to those excluded from society, feeling easy solidarity and compassion for those who are now close to them. Probably, this is not just due to legal inconsistencies that maintain traditional privileges or the party system, sometimes termed “castes,” in the traditional style of India: closed groups of power or families, but in this case not so much controlled by blood ties. This is caused not only by the loss of purchasing power or toughening living conditions, but also by the visibility of those multinational fortunes that fly as if through cyberspace: this is precisely what has created a great consensus of frustration and complaints. This is coupled with a feeling of general impoverishment and, above all, a lack of job security, the ability to maintain a place of residence, and the care of a family in the face of an unstable, unpredictable horizon.

That is why, when news of corruption emerges, as in the case of members of the British Parliament in the 2006 scandal, a shielding window had to be fitted in order that members of the public listening to the debates could not throw eggs or rubbish at them. Members of Parliament consequently have to be defended from those who elected them: precisely the people they are supposed to represent. Like monkeys in a zoo in winter, they are protected from having peanuts or dirt thrown at them. This is even more the case in Britain, where members of parliament depend on their region—their voters—more than the party itself, as is the case in other democracies or, better still, “democratically” elected partocracies.

If this is the case in one of the world’s oldest democracies, with centuries of history, it is easy to understand how the system of representation is more unstable in countries where institutions are relatively new and have not had the prestige of centuries, at least the prestige of something that has worked despite its defects.

But even in Britain, where the system seems more stable, Queen Elizabeth II, can actually officially refuse to sign certain laws or, if they are not to her liking, negotiate to gain other benefits, as she sees fit. The contradiction between a democratic and supposedly more rational system for governing peoples and the old privileges inherited over centuries is manifest. Not everyone is equal under the law, in nations with hereditary monarchies. Another issue is that this provides a sense of stability that assists the development of business, even if the monarch is more than ninety

years old, since she is still head of the Commonwealth, coupled with her popular support and the affection that remains. This is an image of what the British people are, or of the tradition that made the United Kingdom an empire; and it still is, despite some decline, one of the richest and most powerful countries on the planet—hence the great popular support. The people, with close ties to their traditions, continue largely to support or sustain the monarchy—a rich and very specific family, bestowed with enormous privileges, simply due to genetics.

The House of Lords is a similar case. Perhaps in other times it made sense to give an armchair to nobles and bishops; today this is no longer the case. A body of highly qualified decision-makers does, however, have a place in maintaining the course of nations, over and above the particular interests of parties and pressure groups, since stability is also very important for business. It is true that a certain confidence is achieved through state structures maintained by civil servants, with no fear over the security of their position, which is deserved because of their knowledge, diligence, and availability, almost for their entire life or up to retirement. They could also consider legislating or amending the laws in a more distant future and think about how to achieve the best for all and not just for a few. But for this to happen, this must not be a chamber of lords or those privileged by birth or fortune, since this is precisely how they have used their position and still use it to defend their advantages over others, refusing to abolish slavery, amongst many other cases. This must therefore be a chamber of wise men, as Plato considered essential for the good government of nations.

CHAPTER 5

THE UPPER HOUSE, THE COUNCIL OF SAGES IN THE FACE OF OUR *DEMOLIGARCHIES*

A House of Lords chosen from among those with the appropriate merits, from experts in various spheres (finance, commerce, legislation, the judiciary, politics, trade, education, the arts, religion, etc.), may be very useful for avoiding data chaos—the unapproachable mass of information that overwhelms us and is impossible to digest, unless we know how to select this, or someone does so skilfully on our behalf.

Here, then, is a kind of hybrid between the government of the wise, the platonic, and the democratic, more than what we have now, which is a hybrid between demagoguery and oligarchy, with a certain level of intelligent and experienced democracy through these representatives, but which is sometimes constricted by events and feelings of indignation. It makes no sense for these characters to have a hereditary position; instead, they must be the most suitable to deserve the position, and thus the most useful to society as a whole. That is why former prime ministers of the United Kingdom often join the House of Lords, as their experience can always be useful in certain matters and the state cannot steer through sudden changes of direction without having the appropriate resources to do so. Perhaps, however, in very special circumstances it is necessary to adhere more closely to the criterion of experts. We live in a hybrid system woven by democracy and international oligarchies (which is also a timocracy for countries that they fear and are under the spotlight or are threatened by other much more powerful countries that could be invaders, such as the USA or Russia, for example).

Oligarchies, according to Plato, were a type of government far beneath the ideal, where the distance between rich and poor is widened and money is worshipped as a divinity—which we now see happening—but mixed with democracy, where debauchery led to its collapse, perverting the social order. We have not reached its most serious form of total disorder, and we have found ways to maintain the democratic systems with respect to the laws themselves, except when these are bypassed by the supposed representatives of

the people who are often denounced and punished—but only lightly—since among themselves they tend to protect and treat each other with a benevolence that does not come so easily with other citizens.

Plato considered that the chaos of a society, to which democracy leads, usually led to tyranny, due to the search for a strong power that would return order and stability; but this is the worst solution, according to the great Greek philosopher. His theory was based on the experience he had of the different Greek cities in their diverse and evolving governments. Times have changed to some degree since then, although the election of Trump, with his personal approach, is reminiscent of the return of the tyrants, as was Napoleon III's or Hitler's much more tragic election. This could happen in other parts of Europe in the case of certain radical parties.

Now, moreover, with today's information technologies, we see more than ever that a direct democracy is possible to a certain extent on many issues and that, if there is a willingness to do so, the will of the people can be known—but this is often not the case. On the other hand, we also experience changing public opinion, stirred up by the media, waves of independent opinion (social networks) and free opinion, or events that are judged in a passionate or unobjective way. Shifts in opinion can result from clear lies or simple nonsense. We have returned to something similar to the *agora* of the Greeks, although we are millions of voices, but our willingness to take decisions, if not our ability to listen to all the arguments, indeed can be accepted as new technologies allow for this. However, this must be managed well, so that it does not harm those who proclaim the continuous right to choose, choosing without knowing or without seeing what is behind this, and influenced by passionate or other motives, since many change their minds the very next day. What matters is not so much whether one chooses or not, but whether the system is useful and beneficial to all.

The hypocrisy of a large proportion of political representatives who hold democratic power but have sold out to the particular interests of the global financial system or large investment groups, multinationals, and so on, combined with the general impoverishment of the population and widespread suffering, has led to a general hatred of the political establishment. The representatives are no longer the people and the people no longer feel represented by them. Politicians have become the enemies of those who elected them and ceded power to them, because they have attempted to maintain their privileges or because they have benefited personally from their positions.

In this situation, world experts have become gurus, priests of the unknown mystery of finance, which very few understand but most fear—not because of the system, but because of the consequences it may have for

everyone's economy. Their dogmas and mysteries are accepted as if there were no remedy or possibility of doing anything different, always with the fear that these great flows of capital will fail, destroying the panorama of a nation. The fact that this economy above all enriches only a few usually does not matter if the majority is comfortable. As so many in Russia or China say, the majority wants to live comfortably, rather than defend democratic freedoms . . . Similarly, the majority wants to live comfortably, rather than attend to the severe injustices of profit-sharing in the system. As long as this works for everyone, everybody is satisfied, without thinking about what could be improved, as there is always the fear that things will get worse, as has happened in the case of various populist movements or revolutions.

That is why there is more and more talk of the Tobin tax or of a mechanism that serves as a tax to discourage stock market volatility and ensure that money is used less for vain and empty speculation but rather for the real creation of wealth. If we think of the enormous number of employees who work in banks, speculating with assets on the stock market or otherwise, plus the lawyers around them, who generally have good brains and are very well trained (but in the direction of earning money for themselves or for their companies), we will become conscious of another of humanity's great wastes—a waste of talent, of time, and so on. This attempt, adequate or not, is an indication of the general will to put limits on big capital.

CHAPTER 6

VOTES AGAINST AND HATEFUL REPRESENTATIVES

There is a disturbing element in today's democracies that reveals the negative nature or lack of satisfaction with our political systems. "Voting against" is an increasingly widespread phenomenon in various countries and different continents. People do not vote for another party to govern but rather for a group that can drive out those in power. This is a vote without conviction: one votes to achieve a lesser evil—but devoid of confidence, without real support. The system often allows for only two options, both bad ones, and people try to choose what they consider the least harmful option.

It could be said that democracies, with a tendency to bipartisanship, have been reduced to the power of throwing out the governments that are considered bad or inept every four years. A moment of popular will every so often is not really a system that we can designate as a "government of the people," in the sense that neither the Greeks nor ourselves understood it. Our representatives are only such if they really consult the general will and carry this out, but they do not usually consult us once they have won seats in parliaments or senates.

Another possible option to introduce into our democracies is the option of the negative vote or counter vote. Many times, citizens do not know what is best, but they *do* know what they do not want, and there should be an option for negative votes, votes that subtract other votes. If a candidate receives one hundred votes and has thirty negative votes, their affirmative vote would be seventy. Some might even produce a negative score, below zero.

This, with our current rudimentary ballot systems, typical of primitive democracies, like the electoral systems, would be complicated, but not to the extent that it would be impossible with computer technologies and appropriate programmes. Democracy is government by the people, but this, until now, has been a beautiful chimera that was only achieved in a very vague way, and that is by not only deciding what to accept but also what to

reject, what one does not want, even changing the electoral system, which, as we see in many countries, tends to extend the life of the traditional parties in their comfortable, established structures, like pathetic monarchs—scorned, insulted inhabitants of a past that now appears pretty extinct.

Our so-called representatives appear to have usurped the power we gave them, that of the popular will, and have used this to climb the social pyramid individually, out of ambition, or to develop obscure business and private interests, often those of the party, confronting the society that has discovered them and classified them as traitors, thieves of our trust, our freedom and our power. Thus, in the past when a member of parliament was raised to an honourable position (*onorevole*, as they say in the Italian parliament), they were addressed as “Excellency,” using official forms of address that always confer venerable titles; now, for an immense proportion of the population in many countries, to be a politician is something that tends to be regarded as denigrating and despicable, like a white-collar criminal, a successful swindler, albeit with an attractive appearance, because of the power and impunity they achieve and the wealth that surrounds them. However, on the other hand, they are also detestable, morally, and the glamour around them fades away rapidly, as soon as they enter prison, since the scandal and internal struggles in the system have stripped them of their privileged status.

Thus, we find that politicians are seen as public enemies, hated in many areas of the planet and among the richest countries, perhaps because our human tendency is to prosper or maintain our own position—and people do not take kindly to the loss of power, wealth, comfort, and so on. And this happens not only in underdeveloped countries or countries with more or less authoritarian governments, but also in rich countries that have gone through the crisis and have revealed what used to be half concealed: the corruption of social attitudes, with severe structural damage to the legitimacy of the system. There is also a loss of trust, such as in Greece, Italy or Spain. This, however, has also happened in other ways in France, Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, Taiwan, and so on.

The fact that many people do not feel represented by those they voted for, as there were not many options to choose from, and only on one day every four years, implies that the electoral system does not address the possibilities we have for self-government and that governments are perceived as being very far removed in their interests from the demands of their citizens. On the other hand, their conduct is not concealed from us as to prevent us from learning more and more about it, even the smallest details, without the need for espionage; all that is needed is leaked phrases, words, or documents that one or another airs, in order that the grime be

revealed and they be roundly denounced for their misdemeanours. To consider members of parliament or the Senate as a special class with too many privileges and divorced from their electorate is a serious problem in maintaining confidence in democracy as the fairest or most acceptable political system—or, at least, as the least unfair and most viable and practical system, the *least bad* of all, as is often said. There appears to be a desire to increase the power of the people, despite the fear of populism, manipulated consultations and plebiscites, the results of which can lead a country into highly adverse situations, not initially desired or foreseen by voters (Brexit in the United Kingdom, for instance).

On the other hand, the awareness that the big multinationals, the major commercial concerns or financial bodies are managing our desires while they increase their own profits without increasing ours—or even causing them to fall—leads only to irritation and distrust, to the delegitimation of the system, creating a propensity towards an antidemocratic drift, or the appearance of supposed *saviours* that might bring down everything through their radicalism, as we have seen recently in Venezuela with President Chavez and his successor or, even more clearly, with the emergence of the fascisms of Mussolini and Hitler, that arose under the protection of the ballot boxes. These *saviours* then condemn the world from which they spring, like poisonous mushrooms in a soil of decay.

CHAPTER 7

PROGRESSING WHILE WANING

In the face of the general collapse of confidence in the traditional parties and the current representative system, new groups have emerged, proposing structural transformations and, from time to time, new and radical parties, on both the left and right. There are those who are clearly against the way of life we lead, as they consider this unsustainable, both from the political or organisational point of view, in concept, and from the material and economic point of view: our knowledge of ecology is leading us to realise that we cannot grow in everything and that in certain respects, we need to reduce in order to improve. We cannot and should not consume so much, throw away so much, and waste so much material and effort. Therefore, the economic system, based on indefinite growth in goods produced and consumption, does not appear viable without recycling and other models that limit the expenditure of energy, materials, and effort and, moreover, cause confidence in the same market and consumerist system to crumble.

Surprisingly, after thousands of years of searching and the obsession with achieving quantitative and material growth, although there have been more spiritual centuries, propitious to the construction of pyramids, Greek or Roman temples, mosques, and cathedrals, we are now in a phase in which the material limits of the universe are clearly being revealed to us, at least on planet Earth. And what we have at hand, accessible to us, is too little in scale for such a large population, distributed over megalopolises and communities across the five continents and even in the sea and air. There are no mines with copper or gold for everything, nor oil, nor fields to grow grain indefinitely, and no farms or fuel for indefinite population growth, unless new food-producing techniques are discovered. In any case, it appears that the time of “non-material” growth has arrived—which is not the same as spiritual growth—since huge income can be generated with little expense and few programmes: computer designs and mathematical systems that produce great benefits by saving expenses or creating games, project designs, and so on through a combination of electricity and mechanics.

This is the age of the intelligence-based economy: the infosphere has placed the centre of wealth production upon the creation and management